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Creation Confronts Evolution

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Tuesday Night Banquet Address
The First International Conference on Creationism
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
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Creation Confronts Evolution

by

Robert Gentry

It is a real privilege to be with you this evening, and I would like to introduce my wife. Pat, would you stand? She's been with me all these 24 years. I have had to change my presentation this evening as a result of some things that happened today. I believe that the time has come to perhaps be a little more "up front" than I had planned to be this evening. I will introduce the topic gently, trying to carry us all along together. By the way, are there any evolutionists here tonight? Wonderful. Only one? Another one. Any others? I just want to welcome you tonight. Years ago, I was an evolutionist myself.

At the University of Florida while I was an undergraduate, I took the standard biology course, and that biology course was one which taught the theory of evolution. At the time I entered the university, I would say that I believed the biblical record of creation. I had grown up in a conservative Christian home, had the opportunity of reading the Bible, and for all practical purposes had believed that the story of Adam and Eve was real-- was authentic. The first time I think I remember anyone raising doubts in my mind about the story of creation was in high school. There was a very brief suggestion of evolution at that time, but it didn't really shake my faith. However, the biology course at the University of Florida made me wonder.

Nevertheless, I didn't become an evolutionist until I was in graduate school. There, as I was taking a graduate course in physics--relativistic cosmology--I was fascinated as, week after week, the professor explained the theory of the big bang. In those days, of course, the big bang happened only approximately five and a half billion years ago. Today, the number is around 17 billion. I was fascinated as we studied tensor calculus, relativistic mechanics and dynamics, in connection with the big bang. In fact, I got so involved with the whole idea that day by day, as we were in the class, I found myself absorbing the material. There was only one problem I had--at least I thought there was only one problem--and that was the big bang offered no explanation of how the matter got here in the beginning. In class one day the professor seemed to realize there were doubts about the whole idea, and so he said, "I will tell you what. It really isn't as bad as you might think it is. There was a cosmologist, George Lemaitre, who said years ago that the big bang didn't come about by chance at all. It was really initiated by the finger of God. That's what he said started it." And that resolved most of my doubts about the origin of the big bang. From then on it was much easier to accept everything about the evolution of the universe--the origin of the galaxy, the origin of the stars down to the so-called proto-earth, and then the evolving earth through several billion years of geological time. One particularly strong point in favor of the big bang was the seemingly overwhelming experimental evidence for an ancient age of the earth. Since I thought the age of the earth was based on unquestionable laws of physics, I concluded that the rest of the big bang scenario had to be true as well. I was a happy theistic evolutionist. The six days of creation that I had grown up with became six long geological periods of time. I graduated from the University of Florida with a Master's Degree in Physics and went to work in the defense industry. At every opportunity I vigorously defended this theory of evolution.

Several years later, however, someone pointed out to me that the fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments says, "...in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day..." This statement raised a real question in my mind because it no longer seemed possible to relate the six days of creation with six long

geological periods of time. I had run into a contradiction. Here I was believing in a God whom I thought was a God of truth, and I was happily going down the road of theistic evolution with six long geological periods of time. I could believe in radiometric dating and still accept the God of the Bible at the same time. But now a monkey wrench was thrown into the works, and I didn't know what to do! Well, I thought about it and thought about it, and the more I thought, the more it seemed that I couldn't reconcile a literal six-day creation with an ancient age of the earth. Was my cherished belief in radiometric dating wrong? On the other hand, if God had really created this world, why wasn't there some evidence of it? So I began to ask people: Do you know anything about this thing called creation, or the Flood? Very few seemed to know anything at all. I got a book here and a book there with very limited information; details about origins were always sketchy, and my questions remained unanswered. I had a conflict, and it wouldn't go away. My wife and I talked about it many times; after all, one has to live with one's self--at least she had to live with me--and I had this problem, this dilemma, and she did too, to some extent.

At the initial time of this uncertainty over the age of the earth, I was still employed as a physicist in the defense industry. My work involved nuclear weapons effects. I began to question if that was really the type of work for a Christian to be doing. So I quit and went back to the University of Florida to teach. My wife completed her degree in mathematics while we were there. While teaching, I continued to ponder the many questions about origins and could never seem to find the answers. There was a burning desire to delve into these matters, and it just wouldn't go away.

A few years later we went to a little college up in Washington State, Walla Walla College. In fact, one of our other speakers here was vice-president at that particular time, Dr. Bob Brown. He was very gracious and kind to us while we were there. He has been a good friend ever since. It was at Walla Walla College that I was introduced to that marvelous book, *The Genesis Flood*, and that served to turn the key in this quest for truth. You see, the main thing that was bothering me was the age of the earth. I thought about radiometric dating over and over again and couldn't find anything wrong with the physics of it. But then I began to think about the basic assumption: how do we know that the radioactive decay rate has been constant over billions of years? There in Morris and Whitcomb's book was a short discussion about pleochroic halos. To the best of my memory I never had heard of pleochroic halos in any of my physics courses. But now these halos caught my attention because they were supposedly the evidence that established the constancy of the decay rate over geologic time. And I said to myself, if there is something wrong with radiometric dating, this is where it must be, or at least I have got to find out if there is anything wrong. I have got to look into these pleochroic halos--whatever they are--and find out for myself what is going on.

Without getting into a lot of technical details tonight, these little halos are formed by radioactivity in rocks, especially in mica. Radioactive particles shoot out from tiny specks in the mica and form spherical shells, microscopic in size. If you split mica as thin as a piece of paper so that it appears translucent, you can actually put it under a microscope and see the cross-sections of the spherical shells are just concentric rings. The rings of a certain type of one of these halos are formed by the element uranium, and these were supposed to be the key as to whether or not the decay rate was constant. After teaching at Walla Walla College for one year, I accepted a teaching position at Georgia Tech while working on my Ph.D. in physics. I was still enthused about the possibility of doing research on halos and finding out more about the age and origin of the earth. So I talked to the chairman of the physics department at Georgia Tech about doing a thesis on this topic. Well, he was very honest and forthright with me. He said that earlier in life he had believed the Genesis record of creation. "But," he said, "the older I've gotten, the more I'm convinced that evolution is the scientific explanation for our earth. It has to be very old." He continued, "What I want you to do is to think about this for a while and then come back and talk to me, but I just don't see that you're headed in the right direction if you're considering creation as an alternative to evolution."

Well, after a lot of reading and study I concluded that I had to do research on the halos. To me it seemed that the biblical record of creation took us back only about 6,000 years. And the fourth commandment said, "...in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is..." On this basis I couldn't see how part of the earth was quite ancient and another part quite recent. This was the essence of my conflict. Consequently, there was considerable motivation for me pursue my research on halos, even if it meant sacrificing my Ph.D. program at Georgia Tech and my financial stability for a while.

So I went back to the department chairman and told him how important it was for me to investigate the halos and try to find the truth about the age of the earth. He said, "You've got some theological beliefs don't you?" And I said, "I certainly do, and I want to find out if they're right. I don't believe that there can be that much of a discrepancy between science and the Bible." I concluded, "I've got to find out the answer." He replied,

"I think your chances of finding anything are microscopic, but if you insist on doing this, you'll have to do it some other place. I can't let you do that kind of a thesis topic here because, what would happen to the physics faculty at Georgia Tech if you found something and published it--something that you know is at variance with the standard view of the age of the earth and things like that? We couldn't have it. That would be an embarrassment to this institution." In other words, choose a different thesis topic or leave. So I left! My decision to leave was voluntary.

I began my research with very little money--perhaps about three, four, or five hundred dollars. This was in the summer of 1964. About a year earlier I had borrowed some money and took a trip to Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and obtained some halo-containing mica specimens. These specimens belonged to a scientist who had done work at Dalhousie in the 1930's. I was looking for good uranium halos to see what kind of ring structure they had, so I could find out more about the decay rate, and hopefully, more about the age of the earth.

Now that I was out of Georgia Tech, my most important consideration was the research I had to do. Fortunately, my wonderful wife supported me, meaning that she was in agreement with my goals, in spite of what some people thought was irrational behavior. In any event, that summer we worked on a preliminary report for me to present to a small group of Christian scientists and educators. Nothing came of the meeting, and it was evident I was in for an uphill endeavor to continue the research so I could present the results to a wider audience within the scientific community.

That fall I didn't have a job, and that was a time when physicists should have been able to get work anywhere. I applied for several positions but still didn't get one. Finally I found a job as a substitute mathematics teacher at Sandy Springs High School in Atlanta. During the day I worked as a teacher, and at night I'd do my experiments. By this time I was doing experiments at home. I had converted my bathroom and kitchen into a chemical laboratory of sorts, and the backroom into a darkroom. I worked hard to be ready to make another presentation--this time to the American Association of Physics Teachers at their annual meeting in New York, January 1965. I thought I had found a little something significant in pleochroic halos that needed to be reported to the world of science. In January 1965 I am embarrassed to say that I took just about all of the money my wife and I had in savings and flew to New York City to present my paper to the meeting. Well, only about ten or twelve people were there, and only one person said anything to me after my presentation. I was thinking, this isn't so great after all. Anyway, it did result in one good thing: some friends we had met just a few months earlier thought I wasn't completely off-track and had decided to help us continue the research as best they could.

This was now the spring of 1965. I would get up early in the morning, go over to the microscope, and scan over these little samples of mica day after day. I have to back up now and tell you that, in the midst of looking at all these uranium halos under the microscope, there were other halos that I kept seeing while scanning these samples of mica. Supposedly these were from the chemical element polonium.

Let me stop here for a moment and explain that the standard evolutionary approach to the development of the earth begins with the big bang about 17 billion years ago. Supposedly, the matter in the big bang recondensed somehow to form the stars. And those stars, composed of hydrogen and helium, presumably began a slow process of stellar nucleosynthesis, during which time heavier elements were made. I don't doubt that some elements are made in stellar nucleosynthesis. But the question is whether the heavy elements composing the earth actually came from stellar nucleosynthesis. In addition to all of this, cosmology envisions the second generation of stars exploding, then reaccumulating to form the the early sun surrounded by various rings, one of which finally condenses to form the proto-earth--supposedly a molten or semi-molten ball of matter.

In this scenario the first rocks which began to form as the surface cooled would now be the oldest rocks on earth. They are called Precambrian because they don't have any evidences of life in them, no fossils. The interesting thing is that the Precambrian granites, which are the basement rocks underlying the continents, are the rocks which contain the uranium halos and the polonium halos.

During the first year or so of my studies on halos, I didn't pay any attention to the polonium halos, because those who had seen them years earlier said they could be explained by conventional ideas. Polonium has a very short half-life, meaning the element lives for a short period of time and disappears. The more experiments I did on the uranium halos, the more these polonium halos came to my attention, because the polonium halos were devoid of any radioactivity; on the other hand, the uranium halos, which have a very long half-life, still contain radioactivity. This absence of radioactivity in the polonium halos caused me to look at them again more carefully, and I began to think about their

significance. Their presence in the rocks today can be compared to a polaroid photograph of something that existed for only an instant of time and then disappeared.

The scientist who earlier worked on polonium halos said that the polonium needed to produce these halos was really derived from uranium. His idea meant polonium halos had formed after the rock had crystallized. We'll discuss this in detail in my technical presentation on Thursday afternoon; for now we'll simply summarize and say that this earlier scientist believed that the source of polonium which produced these special halos was emplaced in the rock by some secondary mechanism. He felt the polonium wasn't primordial; that is, it didn't exist at the time the earth formed. And for a long period of time I accepted his conclusions. However, when I did my own experiments, I couldn't find any evidence that polonium halos had come from uranium. This was quite puzzling: if the granites had cooled slowly, how did these polonium halos get into the rocks?

One spring afternoon I was at the microscope in my home laboratory. My wife and I had three small children at that time, and this happened to be their nap time. They were all in bed. I can remember looking up from the microscope and peering out the window. The house was very quiet, and I was contemplating the polonium halos which I had just seen under the microscope. I was thinking, how in the world could I ever solve this enigma? If the granite had cooled slowly, the polonium would have disappeared within a short period of time, certainly within minutes. How then, would this radioactivity have lasted over the long period of time in which it took the granite to cool? And almost instantly two Bible verses flashed in my mind: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth...For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33: 6, 9). It just hit me like this: these are evidences that God left in the rocks, showing how the earth came into existence. I just sat there at the table stunned about what I had just thought!

At first I told only a few close friends about this idea. Later a few more were told. But I generally refrained from spreading it among Bible believers because I wasn't sure it was true. Instead I felt a strong obligation to pursue a course of research that would scientifically investigate every conceivable possible explanation for these polonium halos, except the one I had just thought of--that they were created. If evolutionists were unable to dispute this evidence and provide a verifiable, conventional explanation for the polonium halos, then I would know that God had placed them here to provide Earth's last generation with unambiguous scientific evidence supporting the Genesis record of creation. No other explanation was found, and this is why I am with you tonight. I look at these halos as evidences that God is using to call the attention of the world to His creative power and to the accuracy of the entire Bible.

About a year later I was fortunate enough to go to Columbia Union College for three years. While there, I had some papers published in recognized scientific journals, but not without considerable opposition. The story behind some of that opposition is told in our book. By the way, you have seen my dear wife sitting here with me tonight. I have to confess to you that her name is not on the book by her own request, but I found that she has a tremendous writing talent. So, if you ever see the book, *Creation's Tiny Mystery*, which is soon to go to press--there are brochures on it here at the conference--you will know that my good wife is really the writing hand behind it, and we give her credit for that tonight.

As much as I enjoyed my stay at Columbia Union College, I realized that the facilities there were limited, and I needed better equipment if the research was going to progress. At that particular time, I had found two other very different kinds of halos: the giant halos and the dwarf halos. They were quite rare, and there was no explanation for their origin. Believing that God could help me to have the necessary facilities to further my research on these unusual phenomena, I made a call to the chairman of a government agency--a very responsible government agency. I managed to get an appointment with the chairman of that agency on that particular day, and I showed him what I had found. At that time there was a worldwide search for unusual elements called superheavy elements, then being investigated in laboratories around the world. Through his agreement and influence I traveled first to California and met with a number of scientists at a government research laboratory there. I discussed with them what I had found in terms of evidence. I won't go into all the details and, of course, couldn't elaborate on the conversations that we had, but will just let you know part of my experience there.

The first evening I was there I had the opportunity of meeting with several responsible scientists at this California facility. I had already had a couple of reports published in the recognized literature, and I took one of these with me. The first night I was there one of the scientists immediately became interested when he saw the report and noted what I had written about radioactive halos. As he read that report that night, he saw something was unusual. He saw very quickly that the polonium halos were an enigma, and so he asked me:

"What is going on? What is the explanation of these halos? What are you talking about?" I paused and reflected before answering him.

I was hoping my trip to this laboratory would open up more research opportunities, so I paused before answering. I did not want to say anything that would close up those opportunities prematurely. So I said, "Well, I'm still doing research, and I'd rather not tell you." He looked at me, read the paper again, and retorted pointedly, "Now look. Something is going on. I want you to tell me what you think the implications are for what you have found." I fended him off the second time, saying, "I really don't think I need to tell you tonight." He was almost upset with me when he said, "I insist on your telling me the implications." Finally conceding to his persistent line of questions, I replied, "All right, I want you to remember that you asked me three times before I told you. I think God left evidence of creation." And he hit the ceiling! Then he came down--he started to recount very briefly that his childhood had been marked by a religious experience, which he claimed was not very happy at all, and that he had thrown over religion a long time ago. He had taken part in heated discussions with people about religion on other occasions, and he didn't want any part of it any more. Whereupon he took the paper, read it all over again, and asked me questions for about the next half-hour. At that time it was quite late. I was on Washington time, and he was on California time. It was about three o'clock when I got to bed that night. I thought I had really goofed up things. But I prayed and asked the Lord to watch over the situation.

The next morning I went back down to the laboratory because I was still scheduled to give a seminar that day. He came into the room with a mug of coffee in his hand and just looked at me. I didn't say anything to him, and he didn't say anything to me. He left and came in the second time, looked at me, and again left the room. In the meantime, I had begun a conversation with another scientist whom I had met the previous night. He was a Finnish scientist there as a guest at this laboratory and was quite cordial. The polonium halos didn't trouble him at all. What he wanted to find out was what had I found--what was going on. The third time the other scientist came in that morning, he was smiling as he said, "Listen, I stayed up half the night last night trying to think of another explanation for these polonium halos, and I can't do it."

Now to me he was a very fair-minded individual. I can't relate to you more details about what happened that evening. I will say this. We became close enough friends so that he voluntarily invited me out to this laboratory again later on. I had a cordial relationship with him--and still do as far as I know--although I haven't been in touch with him in several years.

I bring this experience out because, in my estimation, this is an example of how many people feel who believe in evolution and haven't had the evidence for creation presented to them. Or if they have, they haven't had it presented in a way that would appeal to them. There are many fair-minded evolutionists that simply have never heard the creation view presented together with supporting scientific data. In my opinion they all need that opportunity.

On the other hand, some evolutionists are probably so confirmed in their beliefs that they will never change their views regardless of how much evidence is presented for creation. Some of these individuals keep saying there is no evidence for creation science, and they clearly imply in saying this that they mean the Genesis record of creation is wrong. I have decided it is time to publicly challenge this position, and this I did before coming to the Conference. It's something I felt had to be done, and now that it has been done, I do not intend to back down. My challenge was to the National Academy of Sciences, the most esteemed scientific organization in America.

Many of you know that in 1984 the National Academy of Sciences published a booklet entitled, **Science and Creationism: A View from the National Academy of Sciences**. The Academy's booklet presents strong criticisms of creation science, and specifically refers to Genesis. I have taken exception to those criticisms in a letter which I sent to Dr. Frank Press, President of the National Academy of Sciences. That letter, containing my challenge to the Academy, was sent yesterday via overnight mail. I intend to read it publicly on Thursday at the time of my technical presentation. And I have also decided to read it tonight.

(Editor's Note: A copy of the letter that was sent to Dr. Press at the National Academy of Science appears on the next page. Dr. Press was invited but did not attend the presentation of the paper on Thursday, August 7, 1986, nor did he response until April 1987, after Mr. Gentry had sent him a third letter. Dr Press in this reply did not address the issue in question, but only reaffirmed evolution.)

P.O. Box 12067
Knoxville, TN 37912
August 4, 1986

Dr. Frank Press, President
National Academy of Sciences
2101 Constitution Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20418

Dear Dr. Press:

This letter concerns the claims about creation science that were made by you and others in the booklet, Science and Creationism: A View from the National Academy of Sciences, published in 1984 by the National Academy Press. In my book, Creation's Tiny Mystery, which is soon to be published, I focus attention on several statements in the booklet:

...The hypothesis of special creation has, over nearly two centuries, been repeatedly and sympathetically considered and rejected on evidential grounds by qualified observers and experimentalists. In the forms given in the first two chapters of Genesis, it is now an invalidated hypothesis. (p. 7)

It is, therefore, our unequivocal conclusion that creationism, with its accounts of the origin of life by supernatural means, is not science. It subordinates evidence to statements based on authority and revelation. Its documentation is almost entirely limited to the special publications of its advocates. And its central hypothesis is not subject to change in light of new data or demonstration of error. Moreover, when the evidence for creationism has been subjected to the tests of the scientific method, it has been found invalid. (p. 26)

Tuesday, August 5, 1986, marks the beginning of the International Conference on Creationism, to be held on the campus of Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. My technical presentation at this Conference begins at 2 p.m. on Thursday, August 7, 1986. On this occasion I will review the accumulated evidences for creation which I have discovered and published in recognized scientific journals for a period of almost two decades.

These evidences were critically examined by renowned evolutionists when I testified at the 1981 Arkansas creation/evolution trial, and again in 1982 when I gave an invited paper at the symposium "Evolutionists Confront Creationists," sponsored by the Pacific Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. These events must surely have come to the attention of the Academy because: (1) two of the authors of the Academy's booklet were involved in the Arkansas trial--Francisco Ayala as a witness for the ACLU, and Joseph Flom as a member of the New York law firm that assisted the ACLU--and (2) another one of the authors, Preston Cloud of the University of California at Santa Barbara, attended the AAAS symposium where my invited paper was given.

Dr. Press
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Despite this certain knowledge of my work--which was not refuted at Little Rock or at Santa Barbara--the above quotes show that the Academy claims evidence for creation has been tested and found to be invalid. This all-inclusive claim makes no exceptions; so it must be assumed it includes my work as well. However, the Academy's booklet does not even mention my published evidences for creation, much less show that they have been refuted.

I am requesting, therefore, that you make available for this Conference the scientific report which invalidates my results. You could have it sent to one of the Conference organizers, Mr. Robert E. Walsh, or better still just have your office phone the information on this report to Mr. Walsh or Mr. Henry Jackson at . This number will be answered on a 24-hour basis this week.

In case no such report exists, I invite you to come to my presentation on Thursday afternoon with all the evidence which you think invalidates my scientific results. At the end of my presentation, you will be given the opportunity to speak and show where my results are wrong. I urge you to bring as many evolutionists as you can persuade to come with you--especially any Academy members who have investigated my work. This invitation is extended to anyone you may choose to send in your stead.

If the Academy fails to respond to this challenge, it will be evident that the Academy's claim about invalidating the evidences for creation was only one of their greatest wishes. Part or all of this letter will be read during my presentation on Thursday.

Cordially,

Robert V. Gentry
Robert V. Gentry